

The Road Less Traveled – September 15, 2017

It was with a certain trepidation that I sat in the car a few weeks ago, unconsciously holding tight to the handle over the passenger-side door. A repeated glance to my left served as the reality check I desperately needed.

My daughter was driving.

It wasn't that I didn't know the day would come. She had been taking Driver's Ed. We celebrated with her when he aced the written test, and Melissa waited for what seemed like hours so Emma could stand before the clerk at the DMV to receive her permit. I knew it was coming. I just wasn't prepared to actually see her behind the wheel.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and we had been driving around the parking lot at the high school and then through our neighborhood and the one next to it. She then told me she could drive me to the church. So I swallowed hard and replied, "if you think you are ready." So off we went. That trip meant a jaunt down FM 1187 and a left turn against cars coming around the traffic circle.

Emma did fine, but it was definitely a busier street than I had envisioned for her on the first couple of outings. But a little while later we were back home safely, and I was comfortable to call her first experience a great success.

For Emma, though, I think the first couple of outings behind the wheel were eye-opening experiences. I think she was surprised just how many things are happening at once in the process of driving and how many things compete for her attention. We talked about that again a few days ago, and I did my best to convey fatherly wisdom.

"That's why you practice," I offered. "It's not simply to develop your skill. By and large, you already know what to do. But after a while, as you drive more and more, your responses will become second nature. You will make decisions – the right decisions – without any conscious deliberation. You will begin driving by instinct, and the car simply becomes an extension of you. That's when you know that you are a driver."

Our faith is a lot like that, too, or at least mine is. When we are young Christians – either by age or by experience – our walk with Christ seems daunting. The standards set by Jesus seem impossible. Love my enemies? Really? If someone strikes me in the face, I'm supposed to do what? I sometimes still find myself perusing the Bible trying to figure out what Jesus would do in a given situation. If it was only my own faith, it might be a little easier. But I exercise my faith in a world where others are flying by at top speed without any regard to my own personal journey. A WWJD bracelet is helpful, I guess, but knowing what Jesus would do doesn't always translate into me doing likewise.

But over the years I have noticed something. As I have studied and grown in my own faith, decisions that used to require much in the way of internal debate don't require as much anymore. I catch myself looking for the opportunity to do what Jesus would do, rather than what would seem to be in my own best interest. Some of that which used to require concentration on my part now seems more natural, more instinctive.

That's not to say that I don't have to think about my faith anymore. I certainly do – a lot. But like my driving experience, my faith journey has changed as well. When I was a young driver, each trip was a spine-tingling exercise of getting from one point to the other. The journey in between was filled with

anxiety and stress over all of the decisions that I had to make, all of the procedures that I had to monitor, all of the things that could happen if I wasn't careful. As I have matured, however, driving isn't always about the destination, and it's actually something I quite enjoy. When I am alone in the car, it provides a wonderful time of reflection and peace. When my wife is with me, it is a cherished time together, free from the mundane tasks of running a household. The destination is still important, of course, but over time, I have come to recognize and celebrate the value of the journey as well.

So it is with our faith journeys as well. God works on us gradually, sometimes imperceptibly slowly. But one day we wake up and realize something amazing. While we were so busy trying to act like Christians, God was busy, too, actually making us Christians.

See you Sunday.